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SUBJECT: ISRAELI DEFMIN DISCUSSES PA SECURITY PERFORMANCE
WITH A/S WELCH AND DEPUTY NSA ABRAMS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer; Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: On March 23, 2005, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch, Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams and the Ambassador that arms smuggling continues into both Gaza and the West Bank. Despite success by Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces in prohibiting certain attacks and discovering tunnels, Mofaz maintained that they are not taking any steps against the terrorists' infrastructure and that some Palestinian groups continue to plan and carry out terror attacks. He listed the GOI measures to ease Palestinian life and turn over cities to PA security responsibility, but complained about the PA's failure to honor its agreement in the first two cities transferred. Mofaz described PA President Mahmoud Abbas as a "one man show" who has yet to generate any real results in the security field. He labeled the PA minister of National Economy a Hamas member and provided a personal assessment of the role of the PA minister of the Interior. Mofaz summarized his negotiations with Egypt on deployment of border guards to the Philadelphia Strip and urged continuing U.S. pressure on Syria. End Summary.

IDF Security Cooperation with the PA

2. (C) Israel's Defense Minister, Shaul Mofaz, met March 23 with NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch, Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, and the Ambassador. Mofaz assistant Ami Shafran, military secretary Brigadier General Eitan Dangot, and the U.S. Defense Attache also attended. Mofaz said that the PA is effective in stopping terror activity it knows about and has been successful in locating and destroying tunnels in the Philadelphia Strip. He added, however, that the security forces are not active at all in counter-terror operations, leaving the terror groups' infrastructure intact and even growing. He opined that Abbas' counter-terror strategy is simply to contain Hamas by capturing the organization within the political process.

3. (S) According to Mofaz, Abbas recently told him that it would take four-to-six months to reform the PA's security forces, a time frame Mofaz said is far too long in light of the need to immediately address a number of serious threats. First, he noted that smugglers continue to move automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, and other weapons into Gaza. He claimed that terrorist groups had moved five surface-to-air "Strela" missiles into Gaza, warning that the use of these weapons would ruin recent progress in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Second, he said the same types of weapons are being smuggled from Egypt through the Negev into the West Bank, adding that the GOI fears that terrorists will use a surface-to-air missile there if such a weapon can successfully be transferred. Third, Mofaz complained that terror groups continue to dig tunnels under IDF posts and settlements in Gaza with the aim of planting explosives beneath them. Fourth, he mentioned that Israel has information on suicide attacks being prepared from Jenin, Nablus, and "other locations" in the West Bank, where he claimed the recent bombing in Tel Aviv had also been planned. Fifth, he said that support for Palestinian terror from outside groups continues. Finally, he added that the GOI has detected ongoing efforts to transfer knowledge on surface-to-surface rockets from Gaza to the West Bank and fears their use against Israeli cities within the green line or settlements in the West Bank.

4. (C) In contrast, Mofaz said, the IDF is doing all it can to support and strengthen the PA. He insisted that Israel has worked hard on the transfer of towns to the PA. He also complained that the PA has not fulfilled its responsibilities after transfer of Jericho and Tulkarm. For example, Mofaz said the two sides had agreed that the PA would disarm fugitives, end their participation in terrorist groups, require them not to leave the respective towns "for a while" (which Mofaz acknowledged was an undetermined period), and remain under PA supervision. To date, Mofaz claimed, the PA has not implemented these measures against any of the 17 fugitives in Jericho or 35 in Tulkarm. Mofaz said the GOI would not transfer Qalqilya or any other towns until the PA fulfilled these agreements. He listed other steps the GOI has taken to assist the PA, including improving freedom of movement (Mofaz claimed the IDF has reduced the number of roadblocks in the West Bank from "288 to just 12"), allowing

workers to enter Israel, releasing PA vehicles from the port in Ashdod, and saying "'yes' to anything Abbas asked from me." Finally, Mofaz said he offered Abbas a coordinated disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank, but the PA has yet to start the process. He urged the USG to emphasize this point to the PA to prevent disengagement from turning into a "high friction" IDF operation.

Assessments of Abbas, Nasser Yussef, and Mazen Sinokrot

15. (C) In Mofaz's view, PA President Mahmoud Abbas is a "one man show," with all authority and responsibility centered on him alone. The Defense Minister added that he does not believe that Prime Minister Ahmed Qure'i supports Abbas, resulting in an isolation of authority in the President's office with little progress in the security realm.

16. (C) Deputy NSA Abrams asked Mofaz if PA Interior Minister Nassir Yussef is really in charge. Mofaz replied that he has known Yussef for ten years since they were counterparts when Mofaz commanded the IDF Southern Command. Then, he said, Yussef was weak because Arafat had "put him in a corner". Today, he conjectured, Yussef may take more difficult actions because he has President Abbas' backing. Mofaz said, however, that he believes Yussef is unpopular among the competing security groups, adding that without "troops of his own," he may be ineffective. Mofaz reiterated that the GOI is willing to give the PA time, but Israel expects to see results from the PA security forces.

17. (C) Mofaz mentioned the importance of upcoming PA elections and noted that the current PA minister for National Economy, Mazen Sinokrot, is a Hamas member who has transferred funds from his private business to the organization. The Ambassador responded that the GOI had promised to provide additional information on the issue, but we have not yet received it. Picking up a paper on the table, Mofaz said, "I have it right here, we'll translate it and give it to you tomorrow."

Details on the Deployment of Egyptian Border Guards

18. (C) Turning to negotiations on the deployment of 750 border guards along the Egyptian-Gazan frontier, Mofaz said he had met with Egyptian Defense Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and urged the GOE to view the issue in a broader context than a mere border issue. According to Mofaz, the Egyptians need a "full-scale" effort using intelligence to stop weapons from entering Egypt and interdicting weapons in the Sinai; they should not expect the 750 guards on the border to stop smuggling. Mofaz mentioned that an IDF team was in Egypt on March 23 working on the details of his agreement with Tantawi. He said the key principles include an annual review on continuing the deployment, the use of arms and equipment consistent with the border guards' mission, and concluding the negotiations as an agreement between militaries that does not alter the peace treaty. In answer to a question from the Ambassador, Mofaz said he and Tantawi had agreed to local coordination on the border between military commanders; the meeting on March 23 would work out the details.

Keep Pressure on Syria for Full Compliance with UNSCR 1559

19. (C) Mofaz lauded the U.S. position on Syria and urged continued pressure, with the goal being not only a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, but also full compliance with UNSCR 1559. Mofaz said this includes disbanding Hizballah's forces and restoring the Lebanese Army's control in southern Lebanon. He expressed some skepticism that Syria would actually withdraw from Lebanon, noting that Damascus prefers to keep it as a platform for launching terror against Israel and also fears the loss of employment opportunities for the one million Syrians in the country.

10. (U) NEA Assistant Secretary Welch and Deputy National Security Advisor Abrams have cleared this message.

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KURTZER